

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: November 10, 2011

Agenda Item: Calf Creek WMA Fee-Title Donation (Region 2, Ravalli County)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Approval of Final Rule: X

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background: Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to accept the donation of fee-title ownership of approximately 68 acres adjoining Calf Creek Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Ravalli County, northeast of Hamilton. Calf Creek WMA was acquired by FWP for elk winter range in 1960, and currently consists of 2,333 acres. The proposed 68-acre addition shares almost ½-mile of common boundary with the WMA, and would add a ¼-mile buffer from adjoining developed and further developable private lands. Mineral rights, if any, transfer with the property. The minerals remoteness determination states that the potential for mineral development is “so remote as to be negligible”. This donation is offered by Ms. Christopher Young, the owner of the subject parcel, with the intent that the gift be accomplished by the end of 2011.

The 68-acre parcel is a historically grazed pasture of native and non-native grasses, and is non-forested. FWP currently maintains the fence between the two properties, and would simply transfer that effort to the new boundary upon acquisition. The primary benefit of acquiring this property would be an enhanced ability to manage public access during open and closed periods on the WMA, and the ability to avoid subdivision and development in a location where impacts from development would be significant. The property would be open to non-motorized access from April 15 through December 1, along with the rest of Calf Creek WMA.

Public Involvement Process & Results: The EA was available for public review on FWP’s web site from September 13 through October 14. FWP mailed 33 copies of the EA (and 48 email notifications of its availability) to adjacent landowners and interested parties. A public hearing was held on September 28 in Hamilton, and all 6 attendees testified in support (including 2 neighbors and the Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association). FWP also received 10 written comments, all in support (including the Bitterroot Backcountry Horsemen and Corvallis High School’s Classroom without Walls). No opposition was discovered.

Alternatives and Analysis: No-action is the only practical alternative to this proposed action, and would allow the continued possibility of future subdivision and development on elk winter range adjoining Calf Creek WMA.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale: FWP recommends that the Commission approve this proposal. This donation of land would add important wildlife habitat to Calf Creek WMA and avoid future habitat loss. The proposal was supported by local sportsmen and neighboring landowners, among others who commented.

Proposed Motion: Move that the Commission approve the Department’s acquisition of 68 acres to expand Calf Creek WMA by accepting the donation of 68 acres from Ms. Christopher Young and formally thanks Ms. Young for the donation.